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Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents:

A Complete Translation of the Surviving Founders' Typika and Testaments

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8. *John Xenos: Testament of John Xenos for the Monastery of the Mother of God Antiphonetria of Myriokephala on Crete*

Date: September 20, 1031

Translator: Gianfranco Fiaccadori

Edition employed: N. B. Tomadakes, “Ho hagios Ioannes ho Xenos kai Eremites en Krete (10os–11os aion),” *EEBS* 46 (1983–86), 1–117, with edition at pp. 11–12.

Manuscript: Codex Cisamensis (1703 A.D.)

Other translations: None

Institutional History

The history of John Xenos’s foundation is known chiefly from two versions of his *Autobiography* (*Bios kai politeia*), one derived from a fifteenth-century manuscript in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (*Bios C*), and the other derived from a local Cretan manuscript dated to 1703, Codex Cisamensis (*Bios K*). Only the latter contains the full text of John’s *Testament*, while the former is content with a brief summary.

John was born to wealthy parents, in the year 970 according to the Codex Cisamensis, at Siba, which Petit (“Jean Xenos,” p. 7) identified with Sivas, an inland village on the south side of Crete east of the Bay of Mesara.¹ This was less than a decade after Nikephoros Phokas reconquered the island from the Arabs in 961, ending over 130 years of Muslim rule. After pursuing a wandering solitary life for a time, John arrived in the vicinity of Rethymno on the island’s north shore, where, in obedience to a vision from Sts. Eutychios and Eutychianos, he built his first in a series of churches in their honor.² Another celestial vision led to his construction of a monastery in honor of the Mother of God *Antiphonetria* “on the mountain of Myriokephala.”³ A small monastery is still in existence on the site in the village of Myriokephala at the end of a mountain road a considerable distance southwest of Rethymno.

Additional foundations followed, including a church dedicated to St. George *Doubrikas*, probably located where the village of Rhoustika is now to be found on another mountain road southwest of Rethymno, and another dedication to St. George *Opsaropiastes*, perhaps at Choromonasteri southeast of Rethymno.⁴ As was his practice with his previous foundations, John left each of these in the care of a disciple, usually an ordained monk. He then returned to Myriokephala, where he found the monks he had left behind in dire straits. He bought arable land from the local peasants to provide his monks there with more dependable support, and established a dependency in honor of St. Patapios for the supervision of various agricultural pursuits.⁵ These provisions were sufficient to support the needs of a dozen monks.

At this point John decided to take a trip to Constantinople to obtain additional philanthropic support and the privileges he thought important for securing the future of his foundations.⁶ According to the Codex Cisamensis, John obtained from the emperor Romanos III Argyros (1028–

1034) a chrysobull awarding his foundation a yearly cash subvention as well as a dozen sets of monastic clothing. From Patriarch Alexios Studites (1025–1043) John obtained a patriarchal *stauropegion*, a foundation charter, which exempted his foundation from interference by lay or ecclesiastical officials, prohibited the latter from exacting any ecclesiastical taxes, and, most significantly, recognized his monasteries as being independent (*autodespota*); only liturgical commemoration (*anaphora*) was reserved as a patriarchal right. The version of the *Autobiography* represented by the manuscript in the Bodleian Library does not refer to any patriarch, and attributes all the concessions to “our orthodox emperors,” left unnamed. Supporters in the capital sent John back to Crete with sacred vessels, books, and icons for distribution to his monasteries.

John continued his itinerant lifestyle, founding another church dedicated to the Mother of God at Kouphou, which he supported with the acquisition of landed property and the establishment of a vineyard.⁷ A village of this name still exists to the southeast of Chania, a considerable distance up the north coast from John’s original center of activity around Rethymno. An oratory in honor of St. Paul near Aigialos and a sanctuary dedicated to St. George (John’s third to this dedicatee) at Nazogeraia followed.⁸ These seem to have been located a little inland from the south shore in the western end of Crete near the present village of Azogyres. Fleeing his many admirers, John next settled on the west coast of the island in the vicinity of Kisamos near Akte.⁹

Although neither version of his *Autobiography* provides any information on John’s further travels, local tradition holds that he also resided for a time at the village of Spelia, where there is an oratory dedicated to him, and at his traditional place of burial, the monastery of Gouverneto on the large peninsula of Akrotiri on the north coast, due east of Chania.¹⁰

In his *Testament*, John chose to subordinate [1] all the rest of his churches and monasteries to Myriokephala. At present, little is known of the subsequent history of either the main monastery or its many dependencies. Gouverneto remained an active monastery, with its superior Ananias helping to instigate a revolt against the island’s Venetian rulers in 1570.¹¹ Taking confidence in its name, Gouverneto’s monks came to believe that they had authority over all the other monasteries on the island. Reportedly damaged if not destroyed by the Turks in 1770, Myriokephala preserves some wall paintings dating from the early eleventh century.¹² It is possible that there are other religious foundations on Crete that can plausibly trace their origins to John Xenos.

Analysis

Like (5) *Euthymios* and (7) *Latros* then, John’s *Testament* is encapsulated in a kind of hagiographic document, to which fact it undoubtedly owes its preservation.¹³ It is the briefest document in our collection, and has only one purpose, assuring the integrity of all the foundation’s properties. Probably on the basis of his patriarchal *stauropegion* from Alexios Studites, John Xenos considered this foundation to be private property, and hence not subject to either imperial or ecclesiastical control. In earlier eras, founders took their private ownership rights for granted; if they perceived any threat, it was likely from other private individuals, chiefly members of their own families (cf. (1) *Apa Abraham* [5]), who could conceivably press inheritance claims to a religious foundation and its assets if this was not foreclosed. John Xenos and his monasteries, however, lived under the threat of the *charistike*, that mostly infamous program co-sponsored by Emperor

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Basil II (976–1025) and the ecclesiastical hierarchy which resulted in many private religious foundations being granted out to new private concessionaires, usually with disastrous results.¹⁴

The document is dated to A. M. 6536 (= Sept. 1027–Aug. 1028) which accords with the note in both versions of John's *Autobiography* that he drew up his *Testament* after his trip to Constantinople that itself must have taken place, according to Codex Cisamensis, early in the reign of Romanus III (1028–34). That Codex is alone in identifying John's Constantinopolitan benefactors and in providing us with John's year of birth. In (7) *Latros* we have already seen the phenomenon of a more precise text developed alongside (if not actually out of) another that is a more strictly narrative account of the same circumstance. It remains for future study to determine whether the greater precision of both the Codex Cisamensis version of the *Testament* and also of (7) *Latros* is an indication of their accuracy and genuineness (as opposed to the more general accounts to be found in their conventional hagiographic counterparts) or is simply a device employed by later generations in the confection of documentary evidence designed to meet the needs of another era.

Notes on the Introduction

1. *Bios C* 1, ed. Tomadakes, "Hagios Ioannes," (1983–86), p. 4; *Bios K*, p. 8.
2. *Bios C* 1, p. 5; *Bios K*, p. 8; see Petit, "Jean Xenos," p. 7, for identification of the site, southeast of Rethymno.
3. *Bios C* 2, p. 5; *Bios K*, p. 9; Petit, "Jean Xenos," p. 8.
4. *Bios C* 2, p. 5; *Bios K*, p. 9; Petit, "Jean Xenos," pp. 8–11.
5. *Bios C* 3, p. 6; *Bios K*, p. 10; Petit, "Jean Xenos," p. 11–12. For the use of a monastic dependency to supervise properties located at some distance from a monastery, see (9) *Galesios* [144], (13) *Ath. Typikon* [9], and (35) *Skoteine* [10].
6. *Bios C* 3, pp. 6–7; *Bios K*, p. 10; Delehaye, *Deux typika*, p. 189; Petit, "Jean Xenos," p. 12.
7. *Bios C* 4, p. 7; *Bios K*, p. 11; Petit, "Jean Xenos," p. 12.
8. *Bios C* 4, p. 7; *Bios K*, p. 11; Petit, "Jean Xenos," p. 14.
9. *Bios C* 4, p. 7; *Bios K*, p. 11; Petit, "Jean Xenos," pp. 14–15.
10. Petit, "Jean Xenos," pp. 15–16.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 8; Gregory and Kazhdan, "Crete," p. 546; Antourakes, *Myriokephalon*.
13. The *Testament*, found in its complete version only in Codex Cisamensis (*Bios K*), should be compared carefully with the abbreviated account found in the version (*Bios C*) based on the Bodleian manuscript (= Halkin, *BHG* 2196), ed. Tomadakes, "Hagios Joannes," *EEBS* 46, pp. 7–8, lines 122–35.
14. For the *charistike*, see General Bibliography, XXIV: Monasticism and the *Charistike*, along with the discussion below in Chapter Three, Historical Context.

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———, “Ioannes ho Xenos,” *TEE* 6 (1965), cols. 1243–45.

Translation

[1.] In the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ, this is what I order and enjoin, dispose and recommend to everyone that all the monasteries and churches which I by the grace of God have raised and founded, as well as those movable and immovable properties I have donated to them, I wish all of them to be with no exception under the authority of the lady Mother of God of Myriokephala until the end of the present world.¹

[2.] If any of the men on the face of the earth, either emperor or patriarch or metropolitan, either ruling or ruled, great or small, shall dare to deny the real and personal estate donated by me precisely to those monasteries which I have founded (let instead the aforesaid monastic community of Myriokephala own all of it as we have ordained!), may such a one be first accursed by God the Almighty and Our Lord Jesus Christ, and have neither share in the immaculate mysteries nor resolution into dust after death.² May then his portion and lot be with Judas the Betrayer, and may he have the anathema of the [p. 12] three hundred and eighteen God-inspired fathers of the first Nicaean synod; may he inherit the eternal punishment.³

[3.] On the contrary, whoever shall keep undisturbed this testament of mine, let him also preserve unchanged what I have recommended, and may the holy and heavenly God, along with the lady Mother of God, mediatrix of the whole universe, forgive all his sins. At the time of the fearful judgment, may he forgive his faults in both the present and the world to come, and place him on his right-hand side. May such a one be heir of his reign. So be it.⁴

[On the] twentieth [day], in the month of September, year of the world 6536 [= A.D. 1027/28], year of the Lord 1027.⁵

The hand of Moschos, deacon and notary of the fort of Chandax, has signed.⁶

I, Philaretos Bracheon, *protospatharios* and *strategos* of Crete, being present to this testament of the monk John, have signed upon summons.

I, Eumathios, *protospatharios* and *strategos* of Crete, being present to this testament of the monk and hermit John, have signed.

I, the priest Leo Daphereras, notary by the imperial authority, have transcribed the present testament of our holy father John of Crete, surnamed “*Xenos* (the) monk.”

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Notes on the Translation

1. *Bios C 4*, p. 7, mentions only churches among the protected institutions, to which *Bios K* adds here monasteries. *Bios C 4*, however, mentions “animate” property, i.e., livestock, which *Bios K*’s *Testament* omits. The attribution of ownership to the Mother of God is found only in *Bios K*.
2. *Bios K* here has a longer list of potential violators of the foundation’s autonomy, though curiously it omits bishops, who are mentioned in *Bios C 4*’s account. The protection of donated personal property and real estate is found only in *Bios K*; so also the declaration of subordination of all the monasteries to Myriokephala.
3. This is a slightly different and longer version of the curse found in *Bios C 4*; for some other examples from the eleventh century, see (9) *Galesios* [246], (10) *Eleousa* [19], (18) *Nea Gephyra* [4], (19) *Attaleiates* [8], [23], (22) *Evergetis* [12], and (24) *Christodoulos* [B14].
4. *Bios K* here adds the Mother of God to the Divinity himself as a protector of John’s *Testament*.
5. *Bios C* is undated.
6. *Bios C 4*, a narrative account, lacks signatories.